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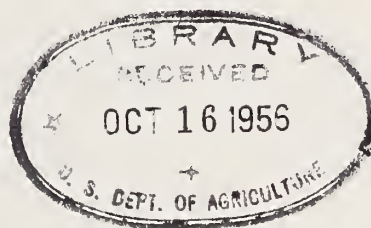
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"Completion for What?"

A Look at Completion Procedures in 4-H Club Work

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This study was undertaken during Sabbatic Leave

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of Mr. Barker.

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## "Completion for What?"

### A Look at Completion Procedures in 4-H Club Work

#### Introduction

This paper, as the title suggests, questions some long established concepts in 4-H Club work. The title itself is a query stated in a letter received from an experienced State 4-H Club leader. It mirrors several years of soul-searching on my part, years marked by an increasing exposure to the real meaning of education. While the meaning has become clearer, I cannot say as much for my skill in applying that meaning.

In writing this paper, I was fully aware of the insistent realities of habit, custom, and general acceptance that surround the concept of completion. For that very reason, if for no others, this venture has been no arm-chair exercise. As Joseph Jastrow says in his analysis of Freud's theories: "This excursion is not one to fill the idle moments of an empty day."

It has taken some thinking--a mental gymnastic one normally avoids. It has required extensive reading. It has involved an analysis of letters from State 4-H Club leaders on the subject. It has necessitated the examination of 4-H Club record books from the several States. It has taken the better part of a six months' sabbatic leave.

I make no claims that this is a scientific treatise. Neither my training nor my inclination favored such a discussion. Admittedly it was undertaken because I felt that completion was a questionable approach to some immensely valuable behavior patterns in 4-H Club members. This bias may have influenced my conclusions. I may have looked only for what I wanted to find, and have found only what I looked for. I would like to believe that this is not entirely the case.

#### In a personal vein

At the risk of appearing to be fascinated by my own reminiscences, I would like to trace my personal interest in the subject of completion.

As a young county agent with a major in dairy husbandry, I was placed in charge of the 4-H Club program in a California county. This was not an uncommon experience then, nor is it today. Knowing nothing about 4-H Club work, I followed the "book." The "book" said that a high percentage of completions was desirable. The "book" said other things, too, but the one that seemed most important to me was completion. Here was a specific figure, a tangible measure of results, one that could be improved if enough attention was given to it.

After fumbling around for a year or two, I found a good formula. Completion, as I understood it, meant a project record book. So, emphasis on the record book became the number one objective.

I talked about record books from "dawn til' dusk." There were periodic check-ups with local leaders. In midyear, leaders were permitted to cancel out the names of all those members who had failed to start a project. Does that have a familiar ring? Also, leaders were urged to keep track of those members who would be leaving the community during summer vacation. They were assured that a record book from such a member, even though the club year and the project were not finished, would be considered a completion. Are such interpretations unusual?

Finally, I visited those members who had successfully resisted the leaders' efforts to secure records. I talked to the parents as well as the members, usually around the kitchen table with a plate of cookies and a pitcher of milk handy. Together we examined the meaning of 4-H Club work, and its failures in terms of the family's experience.

We ended by filling out a project record. In most cases the visit resulted in appreciative parents, and a happier youngster who continued in 4-H Club work. As a result, we closed the year with a high percentage of completions.

We continued our emphasis on completion with continued high percentages. Then, as we gained experience in analyzing our work, reenrollment emerged as another significant guide to performance. We noticed that some 4-H Clubs retained more of their members than other clubs with comparable completion percentages. The reasons seemed to lie in the quality of leadership and the character of the local club programs. It seemed to us, also, that the total impact of the club program on a community could be gauged better by reenrollment than by completion. This induced us to strengthen leadership and program. We relaxed our efforts on the mechanics of securing record books. Completion fell slightly, but reenrollment climbed.

Later, having moved to the State office, I had a chance to compare my conclusions with annual report figures for the State. Also there were available to me for the first time Federal studies by Shinn, Joy, Crile and Sabrosky bearing on this same subject. From these new experiences came two main ideas. One was that the most dependable measure of the value of 4-H Club work was the effect it had on the lives of the club members. This meant attention to programs and methods. The other was the value of certain statistics in measuring the effectiveness of our work as extension agents. This meant a continuing analysis of completion, reenrollment, potential reached, and member-agent ratio.

Belatedly in California we embarked upon a Junior Leader program, although for many years we had recognized older members by special



title and insignia. In the Junior Leader program we emphasized greater personal contact with the younger members and their parents. It was our hope thereby to reduce the number of drop-outs in this younger age group. Results were generally satisfactory. The proteges of the Junior Leaders completed and reenrolled at a higher rate than other club members.

There is one last personal experience to relate. Our State took part in the Western States' First Year Member Study, which began in 1950. One of the aspects of the study was reenrollment of first year members. After the first three phases of the study were completed, an interpretive summary was prepared by Laurel K. Sabrosky, who was cooperating with the study committee. This careful analysis pointed out the many factors involved with the failure of 4-H Club members to reenroll. In the main, the factors were reasonable, and consistent with experience. However, some of the interpretations were clouded by their dependence upon completion. Completion had a different meaning for each of the 11 States in the study. This difference in meaning, it seemed to me, robbed the study of some of its full significance. It called to mind other extension studies where completion was a critical measure. And it raised this question: If there is so much variability among 11 States, what is the picture nationally?

From these experiences four ideas emerged. High percentage of completion, properly pressured and suitably interpreted could be attained, if it seemed important to the agent. High reenrollment, while dependent in part upon high completion, presented a real educational challenge in fitting program to the needs of club members. Longer tenure could be secured by using Junior Leaders to make an important early contact with new members and new families. Completion, variable as it seemed to be in meaning, was not a reliable measure of results.

### Conformity with tradition

Someone has said, "Tradition is like innocence. The good thing about it is the pleasure of violating it." Now that may be a suitable philosophy for some, but it hardly suits the conservative nature of extension folks. Our style, rather, is one described by Clyde Kluckhohn in his Mirror for Man: "It is easier and more satisfying to pattern one's conduct in accord with pre-existing forms-----that seem natural and inevitable."

I have had strong doubts whether my concern about completion procedures was proper. After all, the matter of reporting completion is part of the ritual of statistics, a ritual established over a long period of time, and with considerable justification. No one wants to be a "wrong note dropped deliberately into a familiar melody." To question an established procedure implies the need to find an alternative. In abandoning one bad practice, one runs the risk of adopting another. I am reminded of the case of woman suffrage as described by Bruce Blivens in 20th Century Unlimited. In there he says: "One evidence

of woman suffrage--the polling place has left the saloon, but the lady oddly enough has entered it, not to vote but to drink."

### Inadequacies

Another thing that troubled me was my own lack of background and training in the educational field. The purposes of education, the principles of teaching and learning, objectives, and the need for measuring results were bound up in the routine of completion. Who was I, "a layman in the field of pedagogy," to question established procedures with no basis other than personal experience and conviction?

In addition there was the matter of putting ideas into words--no small task in itself. One must think in terms of words, but on paper they can be empty vehicles. Attempts along the way to discuss my ideas with others convinced me that it would not be easy to make the issues clear. The whole process of completion was a mental tangle. Tradition, policy, the value of records, the meaning of completion, the methods used to secure it, and just plain inertia were some of the barriers to understanding. I was sure that my thesis was defensible. The problem was to put it into words. Alfred North Whitehead once wrote in the *Philosophical Review*: "We cannot weave into a train of thought what we can comprehend in flashes-----For this reason, conventional English is twin sister to barren thought."

### Analyzing the Obvious

The possibility occurred to me, also, that I might be analyzing something that was already obvious to many others. The query, "Completion for What?," coming from a much better qualified person than myself, seemed to point that way. It was reasonable to assume that if my ideas were already obvious to others, anything I might have to say would be as unimportant as most editorials.

### Justification for the study

In spite of these many disquieting reasons for observing the status quo, I finally decided to go ahead with the study. The decision was made more with the idea of finding answers for myself, than for seeking agreement, or creating a controversy. The thing that moved me finally was the recollection of a statement by the French satirist, Raoul Faure in the *Cave and the Rock*. He said: "Conformity is mostly a betrayal carried out with a perfectly clear conscience." It convinced me that if I was to live in contentment, the questions in my mind would have to be settled. Was there an element of dishonesty in the completion procedure? Was it at cross-purposes with education? Were we perpetuating a process and trying to make it do things for which it was no longer suitable? There was little literature on the subject. I could not reason my way out of the quandary without more information. It seemed the time to take the advice of Noel Clarasco in *A Year Among the Men*: "If you want to strike something new, you must poke your own fire."

Purpose of the study

In poking my own fire I hoped:

- (1) To examine within the limits of available data and time the completion procedures of the several States;
- (2) to note the degree of variability in purpose and method;
- (3) to analyze the problem;
- (4) to identify the issues;
- (5) to suggest alternative procedures.



## Background

### "And in the beginning---"

Reduced to simple terms the 4-H Club program consists of three standard practices. These are: (1) to enroll members at a specified time of the year; (2) to guide them in their project and social activities during the 4-H Club year; and (3) to secure reports from them at the close of the year.

The enrollment procedure has remained relatively constant over the years. It has involved membership in a project, neighborhood, community, or school group. Each member has selected one or more home projects in agriculture, homemaking, or related fields. Official lists of members and their projects have been kept by the county extension office.

The guidance of member activities has been subject to considerable change. Overall administration of the 4-H Club program has been and remains the official responsibility of the U.S.D.A. Cooperating on the State level are the Land-Grant Colleges. Originally the members were supervised by Federal employees on a regional basis. Later, with the creation of the Cooperative Extension Service, supervision shifted to State and county professional workers. This was soon followed by the use of adult, volunteer lay persons, serving as leaders on a local community basis. More recently, older club members, termed Junior Leaders, have entered the picture. They have assumed increasing responsibility in the supervision of members and their activities.

The completion procedure represents an adherence to the original pattern, and a departure from it. This contradiction is due to the changing concept of 4-H Club work. In the early years of the program the members were regarded as demonstrators of new and approved practices in agriculture and homemaking. It was through them that extension workers hoped to secure a wider acceptance of new practices by adult farmers and homemakers. Therefore, the yield, quality, cost, income, and profit or savings from the projects were important. Records designed to provide such data were necessary, if the projects were to serve as demonstrations of results.

### The changing concept

With the passage of the years the character of the 4-H Club membership has changed. Increasing numbers of boys and girls from rural nonfarm and urban families have enrolled. From the standpoint of society they have been a valuable addition. But the very nature of their environment has made their projects of little value as demonstrations of results, particularly in agriculture.

In this connection there is an interesting sidelight of 4-H Club history. This dilution of the original rural membership was evidenced as early as 1920. In that year the county agent report forms for the

northern and western States called for data on "urban" 4-H Clubs. Then for a long period of years this item disappeared from the annual reports. It has now reappeared, no doubt to stay.

The character of the home projects has changed in keeping with the change in membership. As early as 1916 handicraft projects were recognized. The emphasis here was on those crafts which had to do with the manufacture and repair of articles useful on the farm and in the farm home. From that time forward enrollment in projects which made little provision for economic returns or savings has made up a large segment of the total project enrollment. These projects represent desirable practices, it is true, but they lack the "punch" necessary for good result demonstrations. Even the substantial agricultural and homemaking projects are more apt to demonstrate the successful application of generally accepted methods than the adoption of new practices.

The organization of local community 4-H Clubs, the widespread use of volunteer leaders, and the evolution of a program loaded with activities are further evidences of the changing concept of 4-H Club work. They are in part the cause and in part the result of a shifting emphasis. Today the total growth of the members, rather than project achievement alone, is the important consideration. It is on human, rather than economic values, that attention now centers.

A statement regarding this shift in emphasis appeared in Extension Service Circular No. 128, dated July, 1930. The author was E. H. Shinn and the circular carried the title, "Educational Values in 4-H Club Work." In it Shinn noted that from the very beginning of extension work there had existed two contrasting points of view regarding the purpose of 4-H Club work. One view held that the chief function was to improve practices in agriculture and homemaking. The other view had as its primary objective the development of boys and girls by giving them a richer appreciation of their environment. The improvement in practices was merely a means toward that end.

In 1954 the Standard Report Form used in the National Awards Program was revised. The new form no longer called for cost, income and net profit from project work. This change came as the result of several years' study by a committee of State 4-H Club leaders. It was a recognition of the need to shift emphasis from economic returns to total growth. Could it also have reflected doubt as to the accuracy of some of the phenomenal profits reported by some State winners?

Still further evidence of the changing concept of 4-H Club work is the June 1954 report of another committee of State and Federal 4-H workers. This committee explored a "graded approach to 4-H Club work." The basis for its study was: "to focus attention upon the development of social skills and abilities; also feelings of self-esteem." The goal of extension workers, stated the report, should be to make such alterations in the 4-H program as will better meet the needs of youth, and keep them in 4-H Club work for a longer period of time. The committee recommended a sharp departure from the conventional home project as a requirement for membership, particularly for boys and girls from 15 - 21.



Some contradictions

It is at this point that contradictions appear. In spite of these many evidences of change in emphasis, the annual report still features member and project completion.

This statistic first appeared in 1916. Yield, cost and income were requested as part of the project data. Beginning in 1920 the annual report form called for information on member and club activities, other than project work. In 1930 the report added another section, This one related to age and tenure of members. And in the 1940's the annual report ceased to call for income and profit, but retained acreage and volume of project work. These changes have to some degree attempted to measure other values of the 4-H program. But tables of comparative results, published annually, still carry a column on percentage of completion.

## The Problem

There are several reasons why our completion procedures present a problem. They group themselves under two general heads--the educational aspects of completion, and the practical aspects of it. In the first group we need to examine our function as teachers; and the principles of learning. In the latter group fall the meanings we put on completion, and the methods we use to secure it. In this same category comes our use of completion as a device to get compliance with activities which we think are desirable.

### Educational Aspects

#### Our role as teachers

Earl C. Kelley in *The Workshop Way of Learning* speaks of the difficulty of overcoming the barriers in our culture between teacher and student. It is our good fortune that we teach in an informal environment where barriers can be pushed aside. The farm, the home, the club meeting, the show ring, and the market place are our classrooms. Our pupils learn in a succession of life situations. There is little makebelieve in their world of learning. The school must of necessity concentrate on the three R's--the tools of learning. We have the much pleasanter task of applying those tools to vivid, living experience. We are concerned with the three A's--adventure, activity and achievement. We cannot and should not forsake the principles of teaching. But we should avoid, in so far as possible, the formal methods and disciplines of the schoolroom.

The lessons our members learn under our guidance can be applied at once. Failure to apply them means loss in capital, in prestige and in acceptance by their peers--not bad grades given by an unfriendly adult.

There is a constant air of excitement in our informal classrooms. This excitement in our boys and girls, combined with the understanding guidance of our leaders, cannot but result in satisfying purpose for both. This we must not lose sight of--if we cannot inspire, we cannot teach.

We have a dual role. We are teachers, and we are agents. In both roles we represent an institution. We are accountable to the public, and to our superiors. As teachers we have considerable freedom, freedom to act honestly and thoughtfully on the basis of beliefs we hold. As agents we feel the necessity of conforming. In this role we are apt to keep an eye on policy, or on what others will think. Here we tend to accept automatic procedures, somewhat like folkways imbedded in tradition. In such a dual role there is an element of uncertainty, confusion, and sometimes despair. It does not call forth our best efforts. And surely, 4-H Club work deserves the best we can give it!

Einstein has said in his essay *On Education*: "The intellect has a sharp eye for methods and tools, but is blind to ends and values."

I doubt if extension agents and 4-H Club leaders would want to be classed as intellectuals. But we must admit that in our search for a more effective method, and in our attempt to master detail, we sometimes lose sight of values and ideals. We find it difficult to apply the principles of teaching. In common with other teachers we find that the children tend to confuse the situation. Instead of having an ideal situation we must be content with a compromise, where the ideal gives way to the expedient.

It's the unexpected that finds us unprepared. However, in our work as in fishing, this is part of the sport. Roderick Haig-Brown in his delightful book, *Fisherman's Spring*, says: "One fishes for the expected and the unexpected, and learns from both. If fish, or rivers, or lakes were ever nearly predictable, a good part of the sport would be gone."

### The meaning of education

Recently I saw a list of 60 definitions of education. The preparation of it must have been an interesting exercise, deserving a more prominent place than the dusty file in which I found it. To that list I have added another. Mine comes from an essay on Freedom and Discipline. The author is Alfred North Whitehead. He exactly describes our 4-H Club situation in scholarly, but luminous language. He defines education as: "The guidance of the individual towards a comprehension of the art of life; and by the art of life I mean the most complete achievement of varied activity, expressing the potentialities of that living creature in the face of its actual environment."

Word by word he pictures the pattern of education as we know it. Step by step he traces our function as educators.

Guidance is one of the picture words in that definition. It is used in anything but a weak sense. J. W. Tilton in *An Educational Psychology of Learning* calls guidance "the heart of educative process." It does not mean a surrender of authority, but a way of using it to advantage. The authority that is associated with age, with knowledge, and with experience is acceptable to our club members. They get from it a sense of security which enables them to venture into new experiences with greater assurance. It permits freedom with some restraint, choice within reasonable limits, and imagination with useful purpose. It does not, in my opinion, imply the imposition of meaningless tasks.

### Motivations

Prof. E. H. Rugh in the Superintendent's 6th Year Book of the National Educational Association states that education depends upon three things:

1. There shall exist in the mind of the pupil a desire to take part.
2. The pupil's desire to take part must be met by the good will of the teacher.



3. Education, then, shall be the joint adventure of these two persons.

It is the first of these, motivation, that concerns us at this point.

Glenn C. Dildine is closer to 4-H Club work than most writers in the field of education. In an unpublished paper he sheds light on the kind of motivation which should be our goal:

"Motivation, the desire and the will to act, springs from within each person, arising from the universal drive to action, aimed at securing the things he needs and wants, or escaping the things he dreads and fears. So we must redefine our ideas from their (4-H Club members') standpoint.-----

What we can actually do is to set up situations which make sense to young people, which fit their present needs and interests. These situations must provide chances for young people to do the things they want to do, which they find are fun to try out.-----Motivation, the inner personal urge to action, is strongest and most positive when there is little inner conflict, when the job to be done directly fulfills many varied needs and desires, or prevents few.-----

He poses the question:

"What would be a consistent dependable basis for judging effective personal development, both for adults and for young people?"

In answer, he writes:

"Common experience and scientific study both, reveal a tremendous difference in the natural capacities and actual achievements of different young people.-----We must continually judge our own work with them by our flexibility and creativeness to meet the wide range of individuals. This raises serious questions about requiring all or even most young people to measure up to any arbitrary, fixed standard of competence or performance as a criterion for their acceptance or participation in our programs.-----This does not mean that we have no need to evaluate or judge individual achievement and growth, however. The question here is how we arrive at and use necessary individual evaluation."

He asks another question.

"What are some of the ways we can tackle this essential understanding of individuals and its application to our work with young people?"

He mentions two:

- "1. The principle of voluntary participation in contrast to external pressure.-----We all find it so easy to use the subtle pressure of our older age and greater social power to try to move young people into the things we want deeply.
2. The process of applying research findings to the individuals with whom we work."

Do not these illuminating words suggest a need for change in our completion procedure? Can we alter the arbitrary nature of completion? Can we find another measure of results? Can we put recordkeeping on a voluntary basis and avoid the "subtle" pressure we now use?

### Practical Aspects

#### The meaning of completion

One of our major problems lies in knowing what is meant by completion. Like education, it seems to have many meanings--as many, I suspect, as there are persons to interpret it. Actually the differences are to be found not so much in meaning as in method. Intermingled with meaning and method, is a third variable--how completion is used and for what purpose.

In an educational sense, completion means to all of us the finishing of an assigned task, the fulfillment of the obligations of membership. No doubt these meanings are much more significant to adults than they are to boys and girls. But there is little quarrel with them as outcomes of the educative process. There is room for disagreement, however, in the fact that these outcomes are determined at one time of year, and are so dependent upon the ability and willingness of the members to perform one last task--that of turning in an acceptable record book.

#### Completion as the States interpret and use it

In order to determine to what degree the States differed in their interpretation of completion, I turned to the State 4-H Club leaders. Each one was asked for a set of his State's 4-H Club record books. In addition each one was asked for a reply to two questions. One question referred to the criteria used in determining completion. The other had to do with the State policy regarding the reenrollment of members who failed to complete. Being "open end" questions they brought replies which varied greatly in completeness and uniformity. The sets of record books were not complete in every case, either, but both letters and record books were adequate to my purpose.

Replies were received from 47 of the 48 State offices. This very generous and prompt reply to my request was evidence of the wide-spread interest in the subject of completions. Many of the letters



frankly stated an interest, and gave me courage to proceed.

All of the States disclaimed a State policy which prevented members from reenrolling because they failed on one occasion to complete. A few admitted what we all know to be the case, that some local leaders would not accept noncompleting members into their 4-H Clubs. Others pointed out that they discouraged the reenrollment of those members who had two successive failures to complete.

Seventeen States had what I termed a flexible completion policy. Of these 17, ten left the decision to the county extension agents. In seven others the decision rested with the local leaders. The remaining 30 States were classified as having definite completion requirements. Some made this point quite emphatic.

Record books were provided by all the 47 States, but it was not clear whether they were a requirement in all the States. The fact that they were provided might be ipso facto evidence that they were required.

Twenty-four of the States had additional requirements, ranging from 1 to as many as 5. These were (1) minimum enrollment period; (2) minimum project requirements; (3) attendance at a specified number of club meetings; (4) presentation of a talk or demonstration; (5) an exhibit of project work; (6) participation in judging activities. Presumably completion was not possible unless one or more of these requirements was met and the record book turned in to the agent or the leader.

This brief summary merely gives the State office policies. The application of these policies by the county agents, and finally the leaders, is something else again. We know from experience that agents differ with the State, and leaders with both. And while no one gets too far out of line with State policy, there is an unlimited diversity in the interpretation of what constitutes a completion.

Officially the completion procedure is supposed to give us a measure of the results of 4-H Club work. The unreliability of this measure is borne out by other evidence from the record books.

One was the importance attached to the project, and to economic returns. One-third of the States provided for a report on project work alone. The remainder in varying degrees recognized the value of activities, and to that degree at least, the total growth of the members. All of the States emphasized economic returns in livestock and crop projects. Fourteen did so in home economics projects. Volume of project work, and skills and techniques were reported in the home economics record books from the other States.

The record books were of every form, shape, size, color, and complexity. The simplest was a one-page check sheet. The most formidable was a virtual enterprise management record of adult scope. The records in 26 States were in book form. In the other States both book and loose-

leaf forms were in use. Thirteen States were using single sheet forms for each project. Thirty-one States had prepared a separate record for each type of project. Sixteen had a different record for junior and senior members.

The record books in 43 States required considerable writing. In 25 States a combination check sheet and narrative type record was used. Thirty-three States made provision for stories, 16 on the project alone, 17 on general experience in 4-H Club work.

There were combination project manuals and record books in 13 States. Several had supplementary brochures, instructing members how to fill out the records. No sets of material from any two States were completely alike.

They were a striking evidence of an attempt to make logic out of the illogical-- to have a desirable practice perform a false function. The desirable practice, obviously, was recordkeeping. The false function was to use the record as one evidence of completion, and completion as a measure of results.

The necessity to report completion has created other uses for it than just a measure of results. It has become linked with recognition. Completion is the basis on which most States annually award certificates, or pins. Much stress is put upon the programs which feature the presentation of these annual awards. They are important events in the lives of those members who have merited recognition. To what extent do they intensify the sense of failure on the part of those who, because they did not comply, are not entitled to attend?

The desire to secure recognition has given us a powerful tool for motivation. It can be wisely used, but we need to ask ourselves if it has been overused. The more it is overused, the more we tend to neglect educationally correct types of incentives. In place of guidance, we substitute direction. It is but a short step from this to compulsion. With each successive overuse, we move further from our educational ideals. Einstein has said: "Give unto the power of the teachers the fewest possible coercive measures, so that the only source of the pupils' respect for the teacher is the human and intellectual qualities of the latter." The evidence points toward the use of recognition as an external pressure to influence behavior. In order to enjoy recognition, a member must comply with an externally imposed set of requirements, which apparently do not seem desirable to them. If they were universally desirable, would pressure be necessary?

In *An Education Psychology for Learning*, Tilton says: "As incentives, children need the pleasures and satisfaction which intimately follow their efforts, not adult judgments which are made once a year in the form of promotion based on grades. The success that contributes in the process of development is the success of any task well done, any problem solved, any meaning discovered. Failure is good motivation



only as long as it provokes greater or better effort. They need failures, too, but little ones." This calls to mind the many successes a member enjoys in the course of a year of club work. A host of new adventures, new activities, and small achievements make membership an exhilarating experience. How can we tell which ones are most significant to the boys and girls? We are justified in highlighting those which seem desirable to us, but only to the degree that they appear to the members as opportunities for learning. But to make recognition contingent upon one or more adult selected requirements is presuming on our social power.

### Clubwork, a continuing experience

Continuation of the 4-H Club experience is one of our major concerns. Only through longer tenure can the objectives of 4-H Club work be fully realized by our members. To the member, tenure means advancement in the organization, usually in terms of years of membership. He takes justifiable pride in adding to those years, and in being recognized as a member in advanced standing. When he states that he has been in club work for ten years, little more need be said. It implies to everyone that it represents many successes, many experiences, many achievements.

In a year of club work, a member undertakes many tasks--some of short, others of long duration. Of necessity each must be completed--we hope with success. Each one represents a step along the way in educational growth. We have no way of knowing which ones have seemed important to the member. If the tasks were undertaken in response to an "inner drive to action," the finishing of them was full of meaning. And the very act of finishing could well have been the urge to tackle another and more challenging task. When this voluntary progression is interrupted by one final task, and that one a "must," it tends to detract from 4-H Club membership as a continuing experience.

To attempt to justify this interruption as the "completion of a year of 4-H Club work" is but another contradiction. Club work is a dynamic experience. It does not end with a due date. Hartshorne in Character and Human Relations pays tribute to the 4-H Clubs because "They are the community, working through its youth to rebuild itself." Surely the building of a community is a continuing effort. In the implied finality of our present completion process have we introduced a static quality which affects our long-time results?

### Issues

It may well be argued that so far I have dealt largely in abstractions. I am inclined to agree. I hope, however, that my reasoning has not reached the stage described by Whitehead as "grasping at straws for promises, and floating on gossamers for deduction." Some of the issues have emerged as the problem was discussed. It is time now to define the issues as sharply as possible to see if they are shadow or substance.

1. Can we ourselves, and our leaders visualize a 4-H Club world where completion, as we now observe it, does not exist?

As Durante might say: "What a revoltin' suggestion!" The issue is a disturbing one. It takes courage on my part just to put it into words. To many persons it will be unacceptable. Yet it is only slightly more revolutionary than the proposal that our 4-H Club program be based on "a graded approach." If that proposal should come to pass, the abandonment of the completion procedure will be an inevitable corollary.

It seems to me that there has already been some conditioning for each a move. The attempt by many of the States to simplify record books may be evidence, not so much of the wish to abandon completion, but to soften the pangs!

Then, too, there has long existed a certain complacency about completion--a "tongue in the cheek" attitude, as it were. Everyone seems agreed that 80% is a good mark to shoot at. If it is much lower than that, something is wrong. If it is much over that, "it can't be honest." So, an arbitrary perfection is somewhere around 80%. Is such a measure, thus arrived at, reliable? I doubt it.

2. Can we rely on correct educational methods to secure the results we desire?

By correct educational methods I mean firm guidance rather than the use of social power. I mean emphasis on opportunities for learning rather than "forced feeding." I mean, too, the recognition of success in many things, large and small, as they occur throughout the year, not necessarily reserved for one star-studded occasion.

The case is well stated by Gertrude L. Warren in Organization of 4-H Club Work, U.S.D.A. Handbook No. 33, 1952. She stresses the habit of success in these words: "A feeling of success on the part of the individual will insure continued membership in the club group over a considerable period.-----In time it is possible for each member in life where he realizes that he can evaluate situations correctly. Then, having decided to go ahead, he is justified in being confident that, with hard work, he will succeed."



3. Are we good enough as teachers to minimize compulsion as a motivation?

I believe we are. The success of the adult extension program is ample evidence of that conviction. We know that one of the drives influencing farmers to adopt better practices is economic success. With homemakers we know it is better health and nutrition for their families. We capitalize on them to make our teaching effective. There is a vast body of literature on the needs and interests of young people--the inner drives that influence their behavior. We have yet to apply them effectively in making a stronger 4-H program, and one more appealing to boys and girls. We can succeed if we put our attention on the goals they have, rather than the ones we have.

But so long as completion remains a yardstick of results and a basis for recognition, we will use it as a compulsion. And the more we use it as a compulsion, the more we fail to develop our talents as creative and imaginative teachers. On the one hand we force participation in certain activities by withholding recognition for completion. On the other hand we deny participation in activities such as summer camp--a priceless experience--to those who have failed to complete. We wield a two-edged sword. But both edges have the same target, the 4-H Club member!

4. Will 4-H Club members keep records on a voluntary basis?

I am not so sure of my ground here. I will venture the opinion, however, that the records which are kept will have meaning to the members. And if they have meaning, they will be kept. Likewise, they will have a greater carry-over effect than the ones which leaders now extract from them.

If records are kept voluntarily, they will need to be of two kinds, and serve two purposes. One should emphasize the project. For the younger member, a check sheet type record which focuses attention on skills and simple subject matter might suffice. For the older member, who has mastered skills and subject matter, a record book which features the economic aspects of the enterprise would be desirable. Such record keeping could be taught, and learned by the member.

A second type of record should emphasize the member, not the project. It would encourage appreciation of accomplishments, however small. It would provide for personal goals. It would help the member judge and measure his own progress toward those goals. It would provide for present achievements, and permit a year by year accumulation. It would be the basis for participation in contest and awards programs. It would make self-evaluation possible. With guidance, rather than coercion from the leaders, it would be highly acceptable.

Many States are far along in the development of such records. Thirty States now make provision for project and activity reports. Thirteen



combine the record with the project manual. One of these inserts questions in the text. Nine have activity records separate from the project records. Sixteen have a permanent record form. Six provide space for a personal plan of work. These forward-looking States can readily capitalize on their work by shifting to a voluntary rather than a compulsory approach.

5. Will voluntary recordkeeping ease the burden on local leaders?

We have recognized life situations in practically every aspect of 4-H Club work, except in recordkeeping. There we are still in the classroom. When our members enroll in 4-H Club work there are no barriers between them and their leaders. But the instant the leaders announce that the strange and formidable record book will determine recognition and advancement, members go on the defensive. The defense against this all-too-familiar classroom technique tends to build other defenses. Communication begins to break down, and the satisfaction that comes to leaders and members when they work together is materially lessened. A defensive attitude with consequent poor communication between teacher and pupil may be a necessary, though unfortunate classroom situation. Both pupil and teacher must live with it as best they can. But a youngster who enrolls voluntarily in a 4-H Club does not have to live with it. He can always drop out--and frequently does.

Records voluntarily kept, with the leaders in the role of counselors, could be valuable educative tools for leaders and members alike. They could be a cooperative adventure in learning. There would be failures. There would be members who made little use of their records. But there would be no stigma attached to the failure as is the case at present.

6. Will the elimination of completion help us to emphasize a continuing process rather than one which ends periodically?

Many of us have struggled with this contradiction in 4-H Club work. We have tried to prevent drop-outs, to increase the tenure of members, to make membership a continuing experience. Always we have come up against the due date of completion, and all the implications in the process. One of the arguments for the community 4-H Club and its year round program of work has been to create a continuing organization. Certainly these have helped. But we need to take a further step, to adopt the point of view that once a member, always a member. Obviously we cannot ignore the necessity for an annual report period. A satisfactory report, however, is not dependent upon our present completion procedure. We have no such process in our adult work. No doubt that is one of the attractive features of it.

Completion and the attendant recognition-exercises introduce a break into the continuity of the club experience. We build to a climax of achievement, and then sink back. There is a lag, while everyone braces for a new start. Leaders take this occasion to depart, leaving us with abandoned clubs. Instead of being able to organize new clubs,

we must find new leaders for the old ones. By the time that task has been done, it is too late to organize new clubs--too late because the members cannot complete by a due date!

Completion is the occasion for achievement programs. Recognition is given to those who have met certain requirements. Usually the only ones who attend are those who are entitled to recognition, and their families. New members, prospective members and their families rarely attend. Why should they? It is no part of their experience. If, on the other hand, these programs were rally nights with recognition going to new members on the basis of enrollment, and to old members on the basis of continuance, would they be more productive events? I can visualize many ways to make such programs real stimuli for the future, challenges to old and new members alike. Boys and girls would catch a vision of the future in such events.

#### 7. Are we as intellectually honest in 4-H Club work as we can be?

There are several disturbing aspects in 4-H Club work. They are more apparent to extension workers than to others. That is as it should be. It would be unfortunate, indeed, if we had to defend ourselves publicly against the charges we level against ourselves within the family. Such a possibility should encourage us to correct, wherever and whenever we can, any developments that threaten the correctness and honesty of our performance.

Here are a few examples. Records that are incomplete, inaccurate, and in some cases highly imaginative have been accepted as a basis for recognition. Goals have been consciously set up that do not call forth our best efforts, such as 80% completion. More and more reliance has been placed on "external pressure" as an easy expedient to secure results. Outer rather than inner incentives have become the rule, not the exception. An unreliable statistic has become our major measure of efficiency. Winning has become more important than ethical behavior.

All of these are realities. We live with them as best we can. When they become abuses we move to correct them. But do we wait too long before we move?



### Alternatives

There are two general courses of action which will correct in whole or in part the dubious features of our present completion procedure. We can retain completion, or we can abandon it.

If we continue with it, there are two possible approaches. One is to "let nature take its course"--the course now evidenced by many of the States toward more realistic procedures. Another is to provide a choice of methods by which members can meet completion requirements.

If we abandon completion, a change in Federal policy is necessary, and a change in the annual report form.

#### Suppose we retain completion

If we accept this alternative, we must recognize that we cannot escape the coercion which is part of the completion process. The statistic remains. As long as it remains, we must comply. And the long chain of questionable practices stays unbroken.

Suppose we "let nature take its course." In that case we can reasonably expect that the present trend toward simpler record books, adjusted to the age of the members, will continue. We may see fewer requirements for completion. And for the older members we may see group projects, instead of individual projects, assuming greater importance.

A second approach would be to provide a choice of methods. This would avoid the arbitrary standards which Dildine deplores. It would permit each member to choose from a list of completion requirements those which have greatest meaning to him. The very act of making the choice would in a sense be establishing personal goals, particularly if the choice was made early in the club year. The tendency for the member to go onto the defensive would be lessened using this approach. The leader would remain a counselor rather than a taskmaster for a longer period of time. On the other hand, the leader would be concerned not with one set of requirements for all the members, but a different set for every member. This could be complicated. There would be more interpretations of completion than exist at the present time. But they would serve a more educative purpose.

#### Suppose we abandon completion

First of all, we count noses, not record books. This has some advantages. The count is not subject to interpretations, nor is it dependent upon the ability to perform a bookkeeping chore. The member is or is not enrolled. It is that simple.

Then we put emphasis on the opportunity to learn. Leaders can at the very start talk about what the member wants to do, not what he

must do. What he wants to do is an "inner drive to action." If we believe in the principles of teaching, we have from the beginning correct motivation.

If we abandon completion, we must look elsewhere for a measure of results. We can find it in the enrollment figures. Members will be in their first, second, or tenth year of 4-H Club work as the case might be. If we wish to measure our success in holding members, we can calculate the percentage of reenrollment. By using reenrollment we can follow our results from year to year for the entire membership. Or we can trace the carryover of first year to second year, second year to third, and so on. The percentage of reenrollment for the entire membership gives us a single statistic, which, better than any other, will help us assess the impact of the 4-H program on all our members. The carryover from year to year will help us locate weak spots in the program for different member groups.

In abandoning completion we cannot hope to eliminate at once, or maybe ever, all the coercions that are part of our way of doing business. Nor will we eliminate all the variables that effect membership. Poor parent interest, inability to get to meetings, families moving away will continue to affect results. But we will not be adding to these causes of failure. Instead, we will be creating chances for success--by eliminating requirements which to some degree tend to reduce membership and tenure.

With completion no longer a major concern, we can extend the work done by many States in developing project and activity records. No longer need the variations be a matter of concern. With the record ceasing to be a measure of results and the source of a statistic, State leaders can make it perform a useful educative function.

The problem of providing data on the size and volume of project work can be met by having leaders submit a summary for each club. This is a detail. Several of the States are already using such a method. After all, our most effective exhibits, when we have a story to tell, is not a page full of figures, but the boys and girls themselves.

### Conclusion

As you have read the preceding pages, you may have felt that I "tried to illuminate a dark room by lighting a succession of matches." To put life into educational abstractions takes more skill than my pen possesses. Something more than the technique of words is needed to give force to my reasoning. As Lionel Trilling puts it in his literary critique *The Opposing Self*, "the power must come not from language, but from moral imagination."

If my statements have been more vigorous in spots than seemed justified, it was not because respect was lacking for the task that thousands of agents and leaders have done over the past quarter century or more. 4-H Club work with all its faults is the envy of many youth groups. It uses methods which the formal educators would like to capture, but cannot. Club work has grown. Boys and girls have joined in increasing numbers. The majority have remained in club work for a significant length of time. But in all honesty, this may have been as much in spite of us, as because of us. It is not that they do what we think they should do, but somehow we have helped them do the things they want to do. In 4-H Club work they have found adventure, where "work is play, and play is life."

As Whitehead says: "A clash of doctrines is not a disaster---It is an opportunity." This study has been an opportunity--an opportunity to take a good look at our educational efforts. Sometimes a good look results in a new look.





